

Sara Creta

Return to Darfur

Return to Darfur is a documentary photography project that investigates the reality of memories of war and migration. It does so by following Anwar's journey back to his home land Darfur after 10 years in exile; its journey in the reality of millions more that are barely living, confined to camps, stripped of their homes, livelihoods, and human dignity.

Witnessing death and experiencing violence and atrocities create traumatic memories, and indelible and unavoidable traces of these events are left behind – not just for those who witness them but also for future generations. How these events and their effects are understood and discussed over time is a perennial challenge to those who experience them, and to those who attempt, long after, to fathom the enduring depths of past human violence.

Anwar was 10 years old when he learned what the word 'genocide' meant. It was 2003 in Darfur, and thousands were being brutally attacked because of their race -- hundreds of thousands murdered, millions displaced, a nation torn apart at the hands of its own government. Do we stay, or is it safer to choose flight?

As he grew up, he was forced to fight. He was only 13. "The first thing they took was my sleep, eyes heavy but wide open". While returning to his land after 10 years in exile, he recalls the horror of being a child in the midst of one of the deadliest modern-day armed conflicts. Memories of his childhood live between the ring of sand around his ankles and the desert hit in his lungs. One day, he had to walk across the desert to find safety and refuge far away from his family. Like thousands, he was pushed to leave the land that war has raged for years, ruining the lives of the people.

Today, he lives in three worlds: his dreams and the experiences of his new life in France that trigger memories of the past. In telling his story of how war erodes consideration and thoughtfulness for others, Anwar challenges the meaning of the struggle that he fought to liberate his land, an ideological comparison to the savage civil conflict that destroyed his childhood. But in addition to its emphasis on the beauty of human resilience and hope, war, hatred and violence consume everything in a society, especially children.